New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1947

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"The Mikado"

Herald Tribune

DECEMBER 30, 1947

By HOWARD BARNES

"Right as Right Can Be"

THE D'Oyly Carte Opera Company of London has set up shop at the Century and there is general cause for rejoicing. One does not have to be a confirmed Savoyard to be enchanted by "The Mikado," which has inaugurated its repertory season here. The work itself glows as brightly as it ever did. The wit of W. S. Gilbert is almost perfectly matched with Sir Arthur Sullivan's prodigal and singing score. Although there are many new members in the troupe since its last visit here in 1939, they do a superb job of reviving the classic. In the words of Gilbert, "all is right as right can be" with "The Town of Titipu."

No matter how many times one may have seen the work, there is always a pleasurable shock to rediscover that the gifted collaborators tossed away such a song as "A Wandering Minstrel I" almost immediately after the opening curtain. They could afford to do so. With Ko-Ko, Pooh-Bah, Nanki-Poo and the comely wards of the Lord High Executioner picking up one gracious number after another and combining in magnificent duets, trios and quartets, "The Mikado" is a rare musical entity. Meanwhile, Gilbert has leavened it with sharp-edged lyrics and verbal encounters which have withstood the ravages of time with a vast imperturbability.

Even with indifferent execution the opera can be delightful. In the hands of the D'Oyly Carte Company, it is richly satisfying. Martyn Green, who has been seen here before, is back in the role of Ko-Ko, contributing unerring comic pantomime to the part and singing with pleasant authority. Darrell Fancourt is another member of the repertory group who is appearing once more in New York as the Mikado. It is not a large assignment, but it makes for a rousing climax to a perennially exciting musical satire. In no uncertain manner they hold the present production to the great tradition of Gilbert and Sullivan revivals.

The newer members of the company do not fail them in supporting roles. Thomas Round is particularly good as Nanki-Poo, playing with an easy manner and vocalizing agreeably. Margaret Mitchell is excellent as Yum-Yum, reaching a high point of eloquence in the lovely "Weave the Maiden Hair" number of the second act. Ella Halman, as Katisha, brings an emphatic acting style and a fine contralto to the part of that aging villainess. And Richard Watson, in the difficult job of supplanting Sydney Granville, is a very creditable Pooh-Bah. All roads should lead to the Century Theater for Savoyards these days.

'THE MIKADO.'

Opera written by W. S. Gilbert; composed by Arthur Sullivan; scenery and costumes by Charles Ricketts; orchestra under the direction of Isidore Godfrey; presented by the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company of London at the Century Theater Monday evening, December 29, 1947. The cast:

The Mikado of Japan.....Darrell Fancourt
Nanki-Poo.....Thomas Round
Ko-Ko.....Martyn Green
Pooh-Bah.....Richard Watson
Pish-Tush.....Charles Deming
Go-To.....Peter Pratt
Yum-Yum.....Margaret Mitchell
Pitti-Sing.....Denise Findley
Peep-Bo.....Joan Gillingham
Katisha.....Ella Halman

SYNOPSIS—Act I: Courtyard of Ko-Ko's official residence. Act II: Ko-Ko's garden.

The Sun

DECEMBER 30, 1947

By WARD MOREHOUSE

All in Innocent Merriment.

The town of Titipu was restored to the local stage last night; the waggish Ko-Ko and the lovely Yum-Yum and her adoring Nanki-Poo are back again, and everything is blithesome at the Century. The D'Oyly Carte Opera Company returns triumphantly after an absence of nine years.

"The Mikado," the first of a series of Gilbert and Sullivan offerings, is enchantingly done. It has color and movement, the orchestra accompaniments are excellent, and the physical production is ornamental enough, and it is by no means a thing of shreds and patches.

Ever since 1885 New York has been getting "The Mikado" pretty steadily, and those who relish the Gilbertian lyrics and the Sullivan melodies will find that the Century's visitors from London sing with great buoyance of the flowers that bloom in the spring, of innocent merriment and of objects all sublime. And the "Here's a pretty how-de-do" number stops the show, as it has been known to do in other years.

There are some delightful performances. Thomas Round, a tenor who is an ex-policeman of Britain, is tremendously engaging as that wandering minstrel, Nanki-Poo. Margaret Mitchell is a charming Yum-Yum and Richard Watson, a man of fairly gigantic proportions, is properly haughty and disdainful as the meddling Pooh-Bah. Darrell Fancourt, in ferocious make-up, returns as the Mikado, the role that was once the exclusive property of William Danforth, and Ella

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Halman is terrifying enough as the man-pursuing Katisha.

The most diligent worker in this D'Oyly Carte troupe is, of course, Martyn Green, who appears once more as that jocose fellow, Ko-Ko, the Lord High Executioner, to whom are assigned most of the evening's absurdities. Green sings the Titwillow song with fine effect, and in his efforts to achieve comedy he invents some new business and tries a little of everything. He could probably make good use of Bobby Clark's acrobatic cigar if it were anywhere handy. He is somewhat more industrious than any Ko-Ko within my memory, but I've yet to be convulsed by the antics of this character.

The ladies and gentlemen of Japan are welcome to Broadway. It's a sprightly production that "The Mikado" gets from the D'Oyly Carte company and there is now new cause for another rush upon the Century. Next week: "The Pirates of Penzance."

Daily Mirror

DECEMBER 30, 1947

D'Oyly Carte Back With 'Mikado'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The D'Oyly Carte Opera Co. of London, better than ever, launched a season of Gilbert and Sullivan works at the Century Theatre last night. Several old friends remain with the company and several new and talented principals have been added.

First and foremost of the old friends is Martyn Green, who might be described as the Bobby Clark of Gilbert and Sullivan. Green trots out most of the tricks in the book of hokum and performs them with much artistry and grace that they become sheer delight.

Green opened the season as Ko-Ko, the timid executioner, in "The Mikado" and made him quite the most hilarious fellow to descend on the town since Clark's memorable madcap soldier in "Sweethearts."

Green jigs, hops and skips, turns Japanese fans into flags, impersonates a midget auto, mugs ingratiatingly and makes you have a wonderful time. The audience appreciatively applauded him into numerous encores.

Standouts among the new additions to the troupe are Thomas Round, former Lancaster bobby; Margaret Mitchell, from Harry Lauderland, and Charles Dorning.

Others in the cast meriting salutes are Darrell Fancourt, Richard Watson, Marian Smith, Joan Gillingham and Ella Halman.

Isidore Godfrey, veteran conductor, received a warm and deserved welcome from the first nighters.

The scenery and costumes are fresh and tasteful, a rare and to-be-commended virtue for a Gilbert and Sullivan troupe. Though materials are scarce in England today, designer Charles Ricketts has made the most of those rationed to him.

The program failed to identify the company's current stage director, but he most certainly is entitled to take a prolonged bow. Principals and ensemble have been skillfully coached. They have achieved amazing precision without sacrificing spontaneity.

If "The Mikado" is a representative sample of what the D'Oyly Carte company has to offer us this season, there should be standees for every performance at the Century.

Journal American

DECEMBER 30, 1947

Visiting Savoyards Charm N. Y. Again

By ROBERT GARLAND

With a rapture somewhat modified from that of the most rapturous Savoyards, it's a true pleasure to report that those D'Oyly Carters are here again from London. They've brought nine Gilbert and Sullivan operas with them. Two're one-acters, thrown in to make an evening devoted to "Pinafore" or "The Pirates of Penzance" seem fuller.

As the formal opener of their seven-week season—if I know my visiting English actors, it'll run into 14 or 21—the incomers at the Century make use of the conventional "Mikado." At least two members of the cast which, at the Martin Beck, dealt with the town of Titipu in 1939, are in it. And Isidore Godfrey is there with his baton.

To so controlled an enthusiast as I, "The Mikado" is something less than the double cream of the Savoyard dairy. Personally, I prefer it when it's hot, a la Michael Todd, or swung, a la the Federal Theatre. But the D'Oyly Carters prefer it as it comes, which is neither hot nor swung, but cold and painstakingly traditional...

What I mean to say is that the opening choristers are once more gentlemen of Japan, even if "the lady novelist" is Low a "crooning vocalist." The war is over and "The Mikado" is again respectable!

• • •

Best When Kidded

It was Queen Victoria—wasn't it?—who found the plot of "The Mikado" "rather silly." And, no longer ago than 1935, a Boston doctor protested that it was "immoral, revolutionary and obscene." Even the Arthur Sullivan who wrote the music for the W. S. Gilbert words admitted that their intent was "baddish, caddish and essentially cruel."

These truly Gilbertian shortcomings, along with the librettist's "disgusting insistence on the physical odiousness of any woman growing old," are perhaps more apparent in "The Mikado" than in any of the Gilbert and Sullivan collaborations. But, as usual, the D'Oyly Carters soften them by simply pretending they aren't around.

At the Century, I'm against the Boston doctor, just as I'm with Queen Victoria and Sir Arthur. The plot of "The Mikado" is rather silly and the persistent sadism of W. S. Gilbert's book and lyrics becomes more than a bit provoking. This opener of the D'Oyly Carters' season is, as always, best when it's being sung. And kidded!

Wise in his loyal Gilbert and Sullivan days and generations, Martyn Green — as Ko-Ko, of course—kids "The Mikado" more and more as the familiar evening wanes. He enjoys himself, this English kidder!

• • •

Cute as the Yum-Yum

In his kidding—or clowning, to pick and choose a prettier word—Mr. Green walks while sitting, sits while walking, pretends to have lost a finger and hitch-hikes up and down Charles Ricketts' simple but serviceable imported scenery. The ovation he received last night was spontaneous and hands-across-the-sea-ish. Everyone in sight seemed to be hilarious and happy.

Darrell Fancourt's Mikado, cut from a different pattern, is more like a slant-eyed Frankenstein than his spoken words demand. It's he and Mr. Green who're fortunately hung over from the earlier visiting company. Richard Watson's Pooh-Bah is largely as it should be. On the other hand, the Nanki-Poo of Thomas Round isn't. Not for my money and the most part.

Margaret Mitchell is incredibly cute as the Yum-Yum who talks about "Me Mother" and pronounces "don't" with more originality than correctness. Taking over for the absent Evelyn Gardiner, Ella Halman's Katisha remains the odious old woman of W. S. Gilbert's sadistic imagination. Which is to say that for better or for worse, she's a true Gilbert and Sullivan contralto...

Last night, up near Central Park, an overflowing congregation received the incoming D'Oyly Carters with wide open and ardently applauding palms. Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Mikado" was, at the same time, welcomed.

New York Post

DECEMBER 30, 1947

D'Oyly Carte Company Opens With 'Mikado'

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

It seemed like old times at the Century Theatre last night, when the cherished D'Oyly Carte Company from London opened its season with "The Mikado." The happy pre-war days were back with us the moment Isadore Godfrey stuck his head out of the orchestra pit and started conducting the overture. The carefree years came even closer when the curtain arose to reveal what looked like the same old unambitious scenery. Then, when Martyn Green, favorite of audiences pre-war and post-war, emerged in his familiar role of Ko-Ko and went into those outrageous but now endearing antics of his, it was as if we all hadn't been away.

Even the audience seemed the same. There is obviously a special public for these Gilbert and Sullivan masterpieces, a public that may be a little naive in its enthusiasm for Mr. Green's celebrated mugging, but which knows and loves its Savoy operas with a splendid passion and seems to come to the theatre only when they are on display. It is as letter-perfect in "The Mikado" as the D'Oyly Carte company itself. It is a tolerant audience, too, because it lets Mr. Green substitute "that singular anomaly, the crooning vocalist" for "the lady novelist" without batting a collective eye.

Granville Missed

The only melancholy indication of the passing of time was to be found in the absence of one of the most eminent of the Savoyards, Sydney Granville, who was, I think, my favorite among them. But, though I missed him in the role of the unctious Pooh-Bah, I must admit that his successor, Richard Watson, handles the part in the Granville manner and therefore with delightful effect. In truth, all of the famous roles are so shrewdly standardized by the London company that replacements are often hardly recognizable.

In at least one case the replacement is highly to be commended. Nanki-Poo is now sung by Thomas Round, who, according to the program, used to be a policeman before he became a singing actor. It seems to me that Mr. Round is the most satisfying portrayer of the prince who became a second trombone that the Savoyards have yet shown us. As for the girls of the company, they seemed properly gay and arch last night, but it was a little hard to be sure about them in their Japanese disguises.

The Veterans

It was, however, an evening for the veterans, and the first audience appreciated them properly. Mr. Green bounces around so brightly that it is impossible to be severe with him, even when his willingness to please rather carries him away. If I, for one, ever scold him, it is because he is so fine when he tries a little restraint, but, excessive or not, I cherish his spirit. Then, there is Darrell Fancourt, whose Mikado is as fearsome and impressive as ever.

The D'Oyly Carte company has now become so much a part of American theatregoing tradition and it appeals so powerfully to our sense of nostalgia that it is a little hard to judge one of its performances objectively. I think I am being reasonably unprejudiced, though, when I say that last night "The Mikado" was delightfully sung and acted by a troupe that is going to add a lot to the pleasure of being in New York during the next couple of months.

The New York Times

DECEMBER 30, 1947

D'Oyly Carte Opera Company Opens New Season With 'The Mikado' at Century—First Visit to America Since 1939

By BROOKS ATKINSON

No advanced instruction in Gilbert and Sullivan having been conducted for nine years, classes reconvened last evening at the New Century, where the D'Oyly Carte Company is settling down for the winter term. They opened the course with a revival of "The Mikado." Since all of us are nine years older, it behooves none of us to speak too complacently about the others. But until Darrell Fancourt made his ceremonious entrance as the Mikado in the second act, it looked very much as though the official custodians of Savoy opera had lost the brilliance they used to bestow on New York during their state visits.

* * *

In view of the distressing things that have been happening during the interval, it was cheering to see Isidore Godfrey's carrot-thatched dome rise above the conductor's chair. But when he lifted his baton, the overture was played without sparkle; and when the curtain rose the celebrated affairs of Titipu were related without distinction.

Presently Martyn Green danced on as the apprehensive Ko-Ko, acting and singing with some of the Savoy cachet, and, incidentally, performing grand larceny on all the scenes that were not nailed down—as skilfully and shamelessly as of old. Mr. Green is such an accomplished Savoyard, with both voice and foot, that everyone is willing to forgive his light fingers if the other members of the company do.

* * *

But, alas, it was not until Mr. Fancourt, the ferocious baritone, made his entrance in the second act that this "Mikado" put its tongue in its cheek and began to play Gilbert and Sullivan in the royal style. When Mr. Fancourt dominates the stage, you know that you do not have to take the opera seriously—that the music is a parody of otiose operetta and the lyrics a dry and scornful parody of a whole civilization. By the time Ko-Ko was making up to Katisha toward 11 o'clock, the company and the audience were beginning to understand each other and the old glow was spreading through the theatre.

Without exception, the voices of the present company are good. Add to the familiar and durable voices of Mr. Fancourt and Mr. Green, the condescending bass of Richard Watson as Poo-Bah, the lyric tenor of Thomas Round and the trained voices of Charles Dorning and Peter Pratt, and you have an able group of male soloists. Since Gilbert hated all contraltos, Ella Halman suffers the immutable handicap. But she has a full, resonant voice and sings Katisha admirably. Margaret Mitchell's soprano is light, though sweet enough for Yum-Yum; and with Marian Smith and Joan Gillingham she leads the triumvirate of maids prettily.

The female chorus is vastly superior to the male. It not only sings well, but it has also recaptured the dry mimicry of Victorian coquettishness and moves with lightness and impishness across the stage. Although the male chorus sings with good tone, it is heavy and dull and commits the unpardonable sin of swallowing the words. The rulers of the Savoy empire have been pleased to grant "The Mikado" new scenery and costumes without violating sacred traditions.

To the faithful believers on this side of the Atlantic, these are matters of tremendous importance. Like "Faust," "The Mikado" is above criticism; and like The Times of London, the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company is infallible. No doubt it is too much to expect that the last nine wearing years should leave no mark on a brisk, gleaming tradition. The ultimate crackle was wanting in last evening's performance. Mr. Fancourt and Mr. Green are carrying the sacred fire through the years, although they have not yet ignited the rest of the company. Perhaps they need nothing more mysterious than eggs, fruit juice and beefsteaks.

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 30, 1947

D'Oyly Carte Company's 'Mikado' A Welcome Return of Old Friends

By JOHN CHAPMAN

You know how it is when a dear friend, or even relative, comes to town and you haven't seen him for nine years—and now you've got to. The first thing is, you wonder if he has changed. The next thing is, you wonder if he has changed for the worse. Then, if you are lucky, you see him and find that he is as gay and charming as ever. He hasn't changed a bit.

The dear friend we first-nighters went to see last evening at the Century Theatre was the d'Oyly Carte Opera Company, back from England after a whole war has gone by: back from an England which, we have been told, will never be the same again. All of us went hopefully and some of us went dubiously. Nine years is a long time — plenty of time for a gay and charming body to go to pot and become old and dull.

We first-nighters were lucky, for the d'Oyly Carte company, opening up with "The Mikado," is as wonderfully companionable as ever. The old faces do not show their age and the new faces fit. The troupe hasn't changed a bit. It is going to be great fun to see this old friend once a week for the next few weeks in a Gilbert & Sullivan repertoire.

Old Favorites Durable.

Two favorites from bygone times, Darrell Fancourt and Martyn Green, were in last evening's "Mikado" — Fancourt in the title role and Mr. Green as Ko-Ko. They have not, bless them, changed one bit. Fancourt is as menacing as ever and the rubber legs of Mr.

Green have not lost one bounce. They give one faith in the durability of the good things, the pleasant things, in life.

The new faces—new to us, anyhow—are in the d'Oyly Carte pattern. Richard Watson makes a remarkably picturesque and vocally effective Pooh-Bah, and Thomas Round is an engaging Nanki-Poo.

The perfect solemnity with which Mr. Round sings every verse of the comic "Here's a How d'You Do" number is as right as right can be.

New Faces Right, Too.

Among the ladies of the company there are Margaret Mitchell, a cool and humorous Yum-Yum, and Ella Halman as a frightful, but not too frightful, Katisha.

Nice people, all of them, and it's nice of them to come here to entertain us.

Having made Gilbert & Sullivan operettas its sole business, the d'Oyly Carte Company knows what it is about.

It knows the value of clean, crisp work. It knows it does not have to be pretentious, but merely right. Its orchestra should be modest and it must be — and is — good, with Isidore Godfrey directing.

"The Mikado" plays the rest of this week at the Century. Next week "Trial by Jury" and "The Pirates of Penzance." And after that, still more fun.

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 30, 1947

G & S Lovers Revel In 'Mikado' Revival

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It might well seem that at this stage of the game there could be little left to say about the D'Oyly Carte productions of Gilbert and Sullivan. Surely they have been given here often enough to establish their excellence widely.

The group opened its first season in some years with "The Mikado" last night. It did not exactly make news, because it proved again that there is simply nothing quite like this company.

Demanding Opera.

For all their familiarity with the opera, the actors play with infinite spontaneity. They are bright and authoritative and disciplined.

"The Mikado," like the rest of G. and S., demands the most varied schooling of its players. They have to sing passages as tricky as Mozart, and articulate impeccably. They have to dance and be dramatic actors and comedians.

This group has the unusual ability of appearing to enjoy itself as much as the audience, while it preserves a high traditional style.

The story of "The Mikado" is as intricate and neatly put together as an Einstein theorem. Its satire on laws and officeholders goes through endless witty convolutions.

Green Stands Out.

As one gentleman seeing his first Gilbert and Sullivan remarked last night, "If you could tabulate all the gags, not even counting the songs, this has more than any so-called comedy in town, and they are still funny."

Though it is hard to call anyone in such company a star, Martyn Green stands out inevitably as Ko-Ko, the Lord High Executioner, who cannot help making deals to save his skin, so loses the beauteous Yum-Yum and has to marry the sufficiently decayed Katisha.

Green has control over his body in comic pantomime that is as deft as a card sharp's over his fingers. He can roll on the floor, or climb up the scenery with such aplomb that he is startlingly funny. He has a sense of timing that often makes his silent movement seem strictly orchestrated.

Richard Watson is a grandly superior Poor-Bah, who collects titles as a dog does fleas and knows how to cash in on every one of them. He lives up to his claim that he was "born sneering."

Darrell Fancourt is a terrifying Mikado with a face like a basilisk. He is grandeur personified as he quells even the proud Pooh-Bah.

Thomas Round is a noble Nanki-Poo, the prince disguised as a minstrel to escape the hideous Katisha, and Margaret Mitchell is exquisite as Yum-Yum. Her singing is expert, and she both moves and speaks with an entrancing Oriental lilt. As Katisha, Ella Halman is vastly imposing and has a voice she can let out like a fog horn when she wishes to dismay any gentleman.

Whether the company likes it or not, they are forced to be generous with encores. "Here's a State of Things" nearly prevented the show's ever ending last night.

It seems reassuringly civilized that a male chorus can loudly sing "We Are Gentlemen of Japan" without having anything thrown at them.

Anyone not already a Savoyard is likely to have to become one sooner or later, and this is a perfect opportunity.

PM EXCLUSIVE

DECEMBER 31, 1947

Kronenberger

The Gentlemen of Japan Are Here From England

The theater season and the Christmas season, Anglo-American relations and most of one's young relatives—each is happier, all are happier, for the return of the D'Oyly Carters to these shores. They have been long away, but the next seven weeks should compensate a little for the last nine years. That anointed part of the population who do not set foot in the playhouse unless *The Mikado* or *Patience* or *Pinafore* holds the boards, may now get back into harness, brush up on their humming, and re-convene. And even for those of us to whom the Century Theater is not quite become a temple, nor its stage a shrine, the going should be good.

* * *

Already is, in fact—with a *Mikado* very much in the old, honored D'Oyly Carte, Made-in-England style. The D'Oyly Carters are not out of this world; but they're better than any other Gilbert & Sullivan troupe in it. Time has worked no havoc with them, though necessarily a few changes. The *Mikado* scenery is new, but will scarcely be considered novel. Some of the performers are new, but there is nothing *nouveau* in their behavior. And the orchestra, though still happily led by Isidore Godfrey, seems a trifle thinner and more sedate than it once was.

The voices, however—not least the chorus—are all they should be; so that the music comes through, whether as charming tunes or as an incentive to lordly spoofing. And the D'Oyly Carters know how to spoof it, how to give the right mock-operatic air to a trio, the right pompous gravity to a march. I must confess that Sullivan always keeps me far happier than Gilbert, and that when Gilbert descends to archness and skittishness, or at any rate leaves the way open for them, I am not happy at all. The older I get, the drier and more dead-pan I want my G. & S. Hence I am only partly happy with that prime favorite and *facile princeps* among D'Oyly Carters, Martyn Green. Mr. Green's Ko-Ko is not one of the things that have changed since 1939: it has retained all its shenanigans and all its skill. The legwork in particular is often quite wonderful; and I can think of no one who would amuse me more than Mr. Green, if he could only manage to irritate me less.

* * *

Darrell Fancourt's Mikado remains enjoyably ominous and dragonish; and among the newcomers, Richard Watson makes a very effective Pooh-Bah and Thomas Round a very pleasing Nanki-Poo. Margaret Mitchell, the new Yum-Yum, is as arch as many and prettier than most. Ella Halman is an authoritative Katisha; and whoever did the staging was authoritative also

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

"Topaze"

The New York Times

DECEMBER 29, 1947

Karlweis Appears in 'Topaze' Revival Adapted by Benn Levy From French of Pagnol

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Seventeen years ago Marcel Pagnol's "Topaze" seemed much funnier than it did last Saturday evening with Oscar Karlweis in the chief part at the Morosco. Possibly the natural depravity of man was a gayer topic then, or gallic cynicism was more enjoyable. But probably Frank Morgan' slow-witted pomposity, with the conventional Morgan double-takes, was a style well suited to Topaze's apprenticeship to fraud and blackmail.

Mr. Karlweis, a celebrated Continental actor, plays the part elaborately. He has worked out the details of a complicated vaudeville. Under Leo Mittler's direction "Topaze," which came from the Continent, now has a Continental production.

* * *

According to logic, this should be a perfect arrangement with the artifice of the acting suited to the artifice of the comedy. But to at least one Broadway playgoer, the comic cynicism of "Topaze" becomes diffuse and labored when it is acted deliberately like a five-finger exercise in farce. Mr. Karlweis is too practiced. Tilly Losch, as the female accomplice in wickedness, is too studied. Oliver Smith's settings are too perfect, the furnishings too splendid, and Audrés costumes are too meticulous and ornate. Where there is no spontaneity there is very little entertainment. This production takes Pagnol as seriously as if he were Molière.

* * *

"Topaze" is the story of a fussy and conventional schoolteacher who becomes a great crook. As a schoolteacher Topaze sincerely instructs his students in all the maxims of middle-class morality. But it is M. Pagnol's thesis that all human institutions are corrupt, and he illustrates it in Topaze's bizarre career. As an honest schoolteacher, Topaze gets nothing except his dismissal. But lured innocently into a career of crime, he becomes rich, happy, respected and loved.

Call it satire or cynicism, or call it witty instruction in the ways of the world. But it is certainly an amusing idea, especially in Benn W. Levy's idiomatic adaptation. It can also seem comic in the acting. Equipped with a fierce moustache, Robert Chisholm makes the part of a venal headmaster seem funny by playing it aggressively.

* * *

As the master crook, Clarence Derwent gives a performance that pulls the whole play together, strengthens its plausibility and serves as a model for sophisticated playing in general. For Mr. Derwent is an artificial actor, too; there are mannerisms and little whirls of posturing in his playing, to say nothing of tricks. But he plays with polish and assurance, speed and emphasis, and he gives an impression of being completely casual. Vice seems attractive, desirable, logical and simple good taste when he represents it. Perhaps "Topaze" would be gayer if Mr. Derwent played all the parts in this pedantic revival. ("Topaze" closed after giving one performance.)

'TOPAZE.'

Play by Marcel Pagnol, adapted by Benn W. Levy; staged by Leo Mittler; settings by Oliver Smith; costumes by Audre; lighting by Peggy Clark; New Opera Company production, presented by Yolanda Mero-Irion at the Morosco Theater Saturday evening, December 27, 1947. The cast:

Topaze ..... Oscar Karlweis
Jacques Blondet ..... Alan Shay
Muche ..... Robert Chisholm
Ernestine ..... Effie Afton
Tamise ..... Joe E. Marks
Suzanne Courtoise ..... Tilly Losch
Monsieur Curdier ..... Kevin Matthews
Monsieur Jeserand ..... Clifford Sales
Monsieur Pitart-Verginolles ..... Edward Benjamin
Monsieur De Victor ..... Roy Rogers
Monsieur Troche-Bobine ..... Preston Zakor
Monsieur Durand ..... Sonny Cavall
Monsieur Ramon ..... David Burke
Monsieur Perron ..... Harold Calvin
Baroness Pitart-Verginolles ..... Helen Bonfils
Regis Castel-Benac ..... Clarence Derwent
Butler ..... Jean Saks
Roger De Berville ..... Philip Robinson
Odette ..... Lucille Patton
Policeman ..... Jan Kindler
Germaine ..... Ethel Madsen
A Venerable Old Man ..... G. Swayne Gordon

SYNOPSIS: Act I. A school classroom in the Pension Muche, May, 1910. Act II. A small salon—at the home of Suzanne Courtoise. Late afternoon—same day. Act III, Scene 1. An office of the Topaze Company. Two months later. Scene 2. Same office. One year later.

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 29, 1947

Karlweis, Losch and Derwent Do Their Best in Revival of 'Topaze'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In the new production of "Topaze," which arrived Saturday evening at the Morosco Theatre, enough hands are waved to take care of both shipboard and dockside requirements for the sailing of the S. S. America from Pier 61 at 4 P. M. tomorrow. This is to make certain that everybody realizes that the comedy is French.

And French it is, unmistakably. "Germaine is unhappy with her lover. That's why she is always drinking gin" is a sample Gallicism. It is French in its ironical and realistic attitude and in its pleasantries about lovers and mistresses—and, after seventeen years, it still is a very neat little comedy.

But it seems to me that the new production, with Oscar Karlweis, Tilly Losch and Clarence Derwent, lacks the sparkle of the 1930 offering, in which Frank Morgan had the title role and the company included Mr. Derwent and Phoebe Foster. "Topaze" is a precise comedy and it needs uniformity and precision of style; it has to have an air about it, like a Paris hat or gown.

An Honest Teacher.

The title role is for Mr. Karlweis and he plays it ingratiatingly. An honest and stubborn teacher of children in the Pension Muche, he is sacked for not upping the grades of a pupil whose mother is influential. He is discovered by a Parisian Boss Tweed, a political grafter who finds him useful as a figurehead "director" of a shady company dealing in municipal supplies.

Topaze is gentle, trusting—and honest up to a point, which is the ironical point made by the author, Marcel Pagnol, and nicely conveyed by the adapter, Benn S. Levy. When Topaze, through political pressure, is given what he wants most—which is not power or money but a doctor's degree in moral philosophy—he becomes a changed man. Now sure of himself he takes over the grafting business from his employer, and the employer's mistress as well.

Playing a charming, befuddled charcter is down Mr. Karlweis' alley, which is why Yolanda Mero-Irion of the New Opera Company decided to present this revival. He is a disarming comedian with many pleasant mannerisms.

Sex and Menace.

Mr. Derwent is in his original role of Castel-Benac, the grafter, and he imparts to it a menacing suavity and an exaggeration of French gestures. Miss Losch, well known as a dancer, is making her local debut in the legit as Castel-Benac's mistress. She looks quite sexy in some frilly wrappers of the 1910 period, and she speaks seductively.

Mme. Irion's production is a generous one, with some very pretty sets by Oliver Smith. Some of the rest of a sizable company are not so hot, nor is Leo Mittler's direction suffused with wit. "Topaze" has much to recommend it in its settings and amiable principals—but, being French, it needs a je-ne-sais-quoi and it hasn't got it.

P. S.: After learning of the reviews, which were not exactly enthusiastic, the "Topaze" management decided last night to call it quits and close the show.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

DECEMBER 29, 1947

= *By* **HOWARD BARNES** =

Quaint and Dull

MUCH of the witty cynicism which made Marcel Pagnol's "Topaze" such a success on the stage and screen some fifteen years ago has drained out of the Yolanda Mero-Irion production at the Morosco Theater. Time and changing values have undoubtedly played their part in blurring a satirical commentary on integrity. Even so, the comedy is not well served in the present exhibit. Although Oscar Karlweis practically goes into burlesque routines as the honorable schoolmaster who discovers that getting rich crookedly is exceedingly pleasant, and Clarence Derwent, Tilly Losch and Robert Chisholm aid and abet him, the show never catches fire.

• • •

The Benn W. Levy adaptation still manages to carry over a good deal of Gallic gaiety from the original. In small bits "Topaze" recreates some of the impudent fun which it had when Frank Morgan, or John Barrymore, was portraying the title role. The advent of a gendarme, complaining that the dummy executive's secretary is causing a near riot by strip teasing in an office window, makes for a ludicrous interlude and the final metamorphosis of the stupid, honest hero snaps the whip momentarily. There is even a rather touching moment when Topaze is fired from his school for marking a dunce correctly. On the whole the offering is quaintly soporific.

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Karlweis is so good an actor that it is difficult to see why he so often misses in a cast-iron part. He gives Topaze plenty of body. He modulates the fellow's progress from craven respectability to dashing larceny with nice timing. Unfortunately he spends much of his time in snatches of supposedly comic pantomime which are neither particularly funny nor further the play's development. Derwent suffers from the same indecision in attacking the various scenes. Since one remembers him as very good in the original company, the production must be at fault.

• • •

In her first straight acting assignment on Broadway Miss Losch is more seductive than artful. Her portrayal of Suzanne Courtoise, who befriends Topaze to help her lover in his nefarious transactions is extremely decorative. She is just such a mistress as one would expect a French arriviste of 1910 to covet as an ornament to his success. On the other hand, her movements are so languid that the pace of the play is continually faltering when she is involved in the doings. Leo Mittler is responsible for the staging and deserves most of the censure for its considerable ennui. "Topaze" is not without a certain theatrical charm in its sarcastic salute to financial phenagling, but it creaks in the current exhibit.

"Topaze" closed after Saturday night's performance

New York Post

DECEMBER 29, 1947

Corruption in France Is No Longer Comic

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

The years have not been kind to Marcel Pagnol's old comedy, "Topaze." It is my private impression that this sardonic play about political corruption in France never was the masterpiece many people used to proclaim it, but it did attract a lot of popular attention back in the days when Frank Morgan, who was then an actor, was playing the title role. It also supplied an excellent movie part for the great John Barrymore. On Saturday night it was revived at the Morosco Theatre, with that engaging comedian, Oscar Karlweis, impersonating the naively honest schoolmaster who achieved success as a suave crook, and it seemed pretty feeble entertainment.

As I have said, it never did impress me vastly, but it did have a certain gay cynicism about it that seemed fresh and charming. Its plot appeared to offer a particularly savory version of the theme of the turning worm. The innocent pedagogue, who was victimized by everybody as long as he believed in the world's honesty, but triumphed in love and money as soon as he learned better, made a likable hero, while his final victory over his oppressors, after he found out how to be more successfully corrupt than they were, had its own ironic appeal.

Folk Heroes

It is not my contention that mankind has grown so honorable in the decades since we first saw "Topaze" that this cynical lesson about the way to succeed in life has become repulsive to us. It is true that the old romantic brigands, such as Arsene Lupin, Raffles and Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford, are no longer the folk heroes they used to be, but it would be too much to say that this is the result of any general growth in moral worth. Yet there is no getting away from the fact that "Topaze" has somehow lost its satirical charm and freshness.

Perhaps this is because the amused acceptance of graft and blackmail is so general that an approving comedy about them is taken for granted. But I suspect that such an explanation is as over-cynical as the belief that we have grown in moral stature is over-sentimental. Nevertheless the facts of history have managed to interfere with the charm of "Topaze." The wholesale corruption, which the playwright found so gay and whimsical, lost some of its merry humor when we found out how great a role it played in the fall of France in 1940.

Not Sturdy

There is, of course, more to it than that. History and a change in public viewpoint have something to do with the current failure of the Marcel Pagnol play, but if it were a sturdy enough comedy it could have stood up against any such external difficulties. An infinitely more cynical comedy called "Volpone" assuredly hasn't suffered from similar handicaps. But "Topaze" is no "Volpone." It is just a frail little play that can be buffeted by any prevailing winds.

It is neither greatly helped nor harmed by its production. Mr. Karlweis is a pleasant actor, even though his third-act change from naivete to sophistication is unimpressive. Tilly Losch as the worldly woman Topaze loves, Clarence Derwent as the corrupt politician he outwits, and Robert Chosholm as the pompous schoolmaster who bullies him are what used to be called "adequate;" so is Leo Mittler's direction. The trouble is that so evanescent a comedy needs a brilliance that is not forthcoming.

The Sun

DECEMBER 29, 1947

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

'Topaze' Is Very Weak.

Marcel Pagnol's "Topaze" has lost its charm, if it ever had a great deal, and its present infirmities are heightened by some uninspired playing at the Morosco. When such an actor as the skillful Oscar Karlweis becomes tedious it is apparent that several mistakes have been made. The first and biggest was that of reviving this comedy at all.

In "Topaze" Pagnol makes the observation that honesty is by no means the best policy when employed in a world of shady doings. His comedy, adapted by Benn W. Levy, and presented Saturday evening by Yolanda Mero-Irion for the New Opera Company, again recites the story of the law-abiding, provincial school teacher who is abruptly dismissed for his unwillingness to favor a stupid but wealthy pupil, and who takes up a new life as a swindler and grafter.

I first saw "Topaze" when it was done in New York in 1930 with Frank Morgan as the meek little man who cheats the cheaters and it then seemed a sly and witty comedy of Parisian politics, artfully played by Morgan and his associates, which included the lovely Phoebe Foster and the pleasantly recurrent Clarence Derwent. But I'm now wondering about the validity of those earlier impressions. These revivals do bring up doubts.

Oscar Karlweis, who was such a delightful comedian in "Jacobowsky and the Colonel," frequently seems baffled by the role of Topaze. He is better in his schoolmaster phase than he is when he has become the jaunty sport and master crook. Clarence Derwent, of the explicit diction, brings his flamboyant and occasionally hammy style of acting to the part of the rogue, Castel-Benac, which he created. Tilly Losch is pleasant to look upon, but her playing reveals an inexperience in dramatic roles. There are routine to downright incompetent performances in other assignments.

An expensive production by Mrs. Mero-Irion reveals tasteful period costumes by Audre and some of Oliver Smith's best realistic scenery. Leo Mittler staged the play and appears to have made a fairly clumsy job of it.

"Topaze," originally written by Pagnol as a racy and whimsical satire, emerges as a lumbering stage piece in its current revival. The Pagnol-Levy text is done no service in the playing of the new company at the Morosco.

'Topaze' closed after its first performance Saturday night,—the shortest run of the season thus far.

PM

DECEMBER 29, 1947

An Old French Comedy Seems Very Old Indeed

The first time I saw *Topaze* was at a matinee in 1930, and somewhere during the second act I fell asleep. I have for many years blamed my snooze on eating too much lunch and not being very experienced at matinee-going. But for the future I shall blame my snooze quite definitely on *Topaze*. I was not a critic then; but I can think of no sounder form of criticism now.

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For Topaze, of which I missed not a word nor a whimper on Saturday night, is, theatrically, as out-of-date as sapolio or the carpet-bag. Possibly because French comedies seldom seem in any way natural to begin with, once they go out of style they seem glaringly artificial; once they age even a little, they creak a very great deal. It would be hard to find a creakier piece of machinery than the current *Topaze*, which can't even be recommended as a period piece because it quite lacks period charm.

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It is somehow all the more tedious for being so tidy. Everything happens at the proper moment—and the expected moment. Every hair is in place as on a toupee, where the neatness is a give-away of the deadness. To do *Topaze* justice, it is not without wit and so not wholly without laughs; and it has, for whatever that may mean in French comedy, the courage of its cynicism. The innocent little schoolmaster who is used by crooks as their dupe, but winds up a smarter crook than they are, is not lectured or led away by the police at the end; he goes out of the play a big shot, his pockets full of marbles and a lady on his arm. But watching him change his spots—or rather, acquiring some—is dull going all the same. And his earlier, and more innocent, appearances are even less lively.

• • •

It is certainly not Oscar Karlweis' fault that *Topaze* isn't more fun; he is as right for the title-role as I suspect any one can be, and on occasion quite charming and amusing. The role, however, is so hard to keep afloat that Mr. Karlweis rather works his charm overtime. The others in the cast, which includes Tilly Losch, Clarence Derwent and Robert Chisholm, play along in a nice old-fashioned way—something more suitable to the play, at times, than satisfying to the audience. Even Oliver Smith's sets show a bit of old-fashioned tackiness, without being tongue-in-cheek.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 29, 1947

'Topaze' Closes Day It Opens

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The New Opera Company turned out a revival of "Topaze" which was like a pie covered with exquisite meringue, whose filling never jelled. It closed Saturday night after only one performance.

The physical production was beautiful. What the comedy lacked was a sure imaginative over-all touch. It should have been resilient and springy and flowing. It seemed tentative because its components were not unified.

"Topaze" had an impertinently immoral notion. The schoolteacher of the title was as pure in heart as it is possible to be and live. The mother of one of his pupils, and her protector, saw him as an ideal dummy front for the mythical company through which they made profitable contracts with the city.

Learns the Truth.

When Topaze learned the truth about this Suzanne and her Regis, he moved to turn them over to the police. She seductively convinced him that she was as much a victim of Regis as he was.

He learned Regis' tricks, while Suzanne taught him to appear sophisticated. Before long he proved cleverer than either of them. He maneuvered Regis out of the picture and won Suzanne.

All this was told with a good deal of charm, and deft elaboration. The play built to a deft final scene.

Here it unfortunately lacked unity of direction.

Relies on Tricks.

Oscar Karlweis certainly had the quality for the title role and he had the ingenuity as an actor to project its progress. He was inclined to rely on tricks that had the effect of bringing him sharply into and out of the picture.

He can dominate the stage with a grimace, gesture or sound, but bearing down on stunts lead him to recall occasionally the late Joe Penner. In the final act, reaching a peak of assurance, his performance became forceful and true.

It was Clarence Derwent, veteran of the original American production in the role of Regis, who played with the greatest authority. As the confirmed scoundrel he gave the play backbone and animation.

Tilly Losch was luminous and softly beautiful as Suzanne. Her grace and her telling flashes of expression added greatly to the performance. She had physically and instinctively much to bring this role, and she played it with great taste. What was lacking in her work here was only a more defined projection.

Robert Chisholm was the oily hypocritical schoolmaster, and Joe E. Marks was touching in his picayunish satisfaction as a friend of Topaze.

Helen Bonfils made a bold autocrat of a prolific Baroness, and G. Swayne Gordon was delightful as an authority on blackmail.

Oliver Smith designed luxurious settings for the production, and Audre was credited with the exquisite gowns of Miss Losch, as well as the other costumes.

Journal and American

DECEMBER 29, 1947

An Excellent Comedy Is Badly Produced

By ROBERT GARLAND

If, as is obviously the case, Yolanda Mero-Irion intends to present a Weber-and-Fields dialectal interpretation of Marcel Pagnol's satiric comedy at the Morosco, it's a pity Joe and Lew aren't on hand to show Mr. Marks and Mr. Karlweis how the likes of their Mike and Meyer should be projected.

For in this New Opera Company reproduction of "Topaze" Joe E. Marks, who has come to where he is by way of New York and "Bloomer Girl," and Oscar Karlweis, who has come to where he is by way of Vienna and "Rosalinda," act as if ther're reviving "Higgledy-Piggledy."

As Tamise and Topaze, Frenchmen speaking their native language in their native land, Mr. Marks and Mr. Karlweis have a Weberfields-day all over the Morosco's stage. And when Tilly Losch comes losching on as la belle sans merci, she too is farcically Germanic . . .

Thanks to Mr. Marks, Mr. Karlweis, Miss Losch and Leo Mittler's mittel-European direction, M. Pagnol's "Topaze" is just about as gay and gallic as "Gotterdammerung."

• • •

Once Was Happy

When, in 1930, "Topaze" came first to Broadway in an adaptation by Benn W. Levy, Harry Davenport was in what is now Joe E. Marks' role and Frank Morgan was happily displayed in the part over which Oscar Karlweis is stumbling. Miss Losch's Suzanne was Phoebe Foster's Suzy.

And the adaptation seemed more literate and meaningful than it seemed the night before yesterday. Now, under Mr. Mittler's not very cunning continental hand—he has directed more than 60 plays all over Europe—the comedy's satiric side goes practically unnoticed.

The simple little schoolteacher who is fired for being honest and who, having learned about dishonesty, beats the professionals at their own game, is, at the Morosco, little more than a run-of-the-boulevards trian-

gular affair retold without French humor and with a German accent...

If Mr. Karlweis and Miss Losch remain much longer in America, they'll not be able to speak English at all. Now, between them, they've got Joe E. Marks talking like Joe Weber.

* * *

Settings Good, Anyway

The nicest things about Yolanda Mero-Irion's reproduction of "Topaze" are the settings by Oliver Smith, the costumes by Audre and the assurance it provides that almost any English-speaking player could do better by Topaze and Suzanne than Oscar Karlweis and Tilly Losch.

Joe E. Marks, for instance, who's intentionally funny as Tamise. Or Clarence Derwent, who's serviceably suave as Miss Losch's—if you'll pardon the expression—boy friend. Or Robert Chisholm who, as Muche, could burst into song and improve the New Opera Company's songless evening.

To add to the revival's misguided Weberfieldsian aspect, Helen Bonfils has come on from Denver to provide a Baroness who well might be the Lillian Russell of some 20th Century-Fox musical biography with technicolor and Betty Grable. I wish the rest were silence . . .

Just as this wish is being written, the Broadway heralds sing that last Saturday evening, this "Topaze" gave its opening and closing performances simultaneously. Oscar Karlweis isn't feeling well and I don't blame him!

Daily Mirror

DECEMBER 29, 1947

'Topaze' Lacks The Morgan Touch

By ROBERT COLEMAN

In our opinion, Marcel Pagnol's "Topaze," as adapted by Benn W. Levy, is one of the finest comedies to come over from Europe since the turn of the century. However, it might be difficult for others to agree with that verdict who have seen only the New Opera Company's production of it, currently being presented at the Morosco Theatre by Yolanda Mero-Irion.

One of our all time memories of the theatre is of the sensitive, human, amusing and moving performance of the title role by Frank Morgan in the original production. You sympathized with Morgan. Your heart went out to him. He was a nice, gentle fellow creature in trouble, an honest schoolmaster, devoted to the development of better citizens for France, betrayed by crooks.

And you viewed with regret his enlightenment, his transformation into a smart cookie. It was just too bad that such a decent person should become cynical and disillusioned. And you roared with laughter when he turned on his betrayers and put them to rout. And you were a little sorry to be roaring. Naturally, it was good to have nice little M. Topaze triumph over his seducers, but really he shouldn't have become as ruthless and rotten as he did.

But then you realized that "Topaze" is a sardonic comment on certain facets of politics, ethics, morals, civilization. You left the theatre promising to give a thought to our school system, to investigate thoroughly the backgrounds of political candidates, to be a good citizen so it wouldn't be necessary for the world's amiable, valuable Topazes to turn into predatory lions.

Unfortunately, Oscar Karlweis is no Frank Morgan as Topaze. He gives a musical comedy performance without music. He mugs outrageously, makes weird and distracting noises with his throat, plays to the audience instead of his fellow performers and jumps about stage like a jack out of the box.

The result is that Topaze ceases to be a character and becomes a caricature. No, not caricature — burlesque. Karlweis literally beats the life out of the delightful little fellow with a bludgeon of hokum. And you exit from the Morosco without giving a darn about his fate.

Clarence Derwent again acts the suave, crooked politician, Castel-Benac; acts him as well as Leo Mittler's direction permits. Derwent was excellent in the original production and flashes promisingly in this one. Tilly Losch is a pictorial asset as Mme. Courtoise. Helen Bonfils makes the most of her opportunity as the baroness.

The physical production is handsome, opulent.

Should the critics award a prize this season for the worst directorial job, we predict that Mittler will win it hands down. Here is central European heavy-handedness and clumsiness in full bloom.

"The Cradle Will Rock"

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 27, 1947

Nor Sleet Nor Snow Nor Carping Critics Can Bury Blitzstein

By ROBERT SYLVESTER

Marc Blitzstein's "The Cradle Will Rock" wrote another chapter in its stormy history in an appropriate atmosphere, last night, when Michael Myerberg brought it to his Mansfield theatre for a limited run.

This revival resulted from an ecstatic reception accorded the 10-year-old dramatic opera when Leonard Bernstein did it in concert form at City Center a few weeks ago. "Cradle" is indeed a lusty and vigorous piece of work. It was born against a background of strife and trouble. And it simply refuses to stay dead. Last night's audience was aggressively enthusiastic.

The present production has some fine people connected with it. Bernstein has a part of his symphonic orchestra on the stage. Alfred Drake plays the sympathetic lead. Muriel Smith sings another important role. Will Geer is back in his old part and Paramount Pictures have been "courteous" enough to let Howard Da Silva stage the piece, in the original of which he played a lead.

Won't Give Up.

Nobody can deny, at this point, that "Cradle" is now a standard. This observer, however, still can't see why. The writer didn't like it in 1937 and didn't like it much better last night, even though last night it was done in far more professional and painstaking style.

In this day and age, it seems to me that the basic theme of steel-workers who work only two days a week and girls who go on the streets to earn 30 cents at a time is so outdated as to almost satirize

'THE CRADLE WILL ROCK.'

A play in music by Marc Blitzstein; staged by Howard Da Silva; orchestra conducted by Leonard Bernstein; presented by Michael Myerberg at the Mansfield Theater Friday evening, December 26, 1947. The cast:

Moll	Estelle Loring
Gent	Edward S. Bryce
Dick	Jesse White
Cop	Taggart Casey
Reverend Salvation	Harold Patrick
Editor Daily	Brooks Dunbar
Yasha	Jack Albertson
Dauber	Chandler Cowles
President Prexy	Howard Blaine
Professor Trixie	Leslie Litomy
Professor Mazola	Edmund Hewitt
Professor Scoot	Ray Fry
Doctor Specialist	Robert Pierson
Harry Druggist	David Thomas
Mr. Mister	Will Geer
Mrs. Mister	Vivian Vance
Junior Mister	Dennis King Jr.
Sister Mister	Jo Hurt
Steve	Stephen West Downer
Sadie Polock	Marie Leigal
Gus Polock	Walter Scheff
Buggs	Edward S. Bryce
Larry Foreman	Alfred Drake
Ella Hammer	Muriel Smith
Attendant's Voice	Hazel Shermet
First Reporter	Rex Custon
Second Reporter	Gil Houston
Clerk	Leonard Bernstein

SYNOPSIS: The action, taking place in Steeltown, U. S. A., on the night of a union drive, is presented in ten scenes without intermission.

what Blitzstein is trying to sell. Taken purely as entertainment, "Cradle" is about as modern as a crystal radio set.

Drake brought some life to his scenes, although at times stressing a shrill quality, and Muriel Smith came downstage to sock out a splendid vocal of the "Worker Joe" song. Bernstein, in tails and white tie seemed incongruous as the clerk. Of the rest of the cast, it must be said that those who know how to act can't sing and vice versa. Why Blitzstein doesn't stage the piece sometime with singers only is a mystery. The acting called for is generally declamatory speechmaking.

Personal Objections.

Well, almost everybody on the staff has had a crack at "Cradle" now. Sylvester didn't like it twice, and Doug Watt thought it was sound, exciting stage fare at City Center. Next Tuesday night old John Chapman can go to bat on the subject and, at least as far as Sylvester is concerned, he gets the last, official word.

Daily Mirror

JANUARY 1. 1948

'Cradle Will Rock' Shows Its Age

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Marc Blitzstein's "The Cradle Will Rock" has had a hectic history. Originally written for the WPA-Federal Theatre, it had to be given with a single piano when protests caused that organization to withdraw its sponsorship.

Returning to Broadway at the Mansfield Theatre some 10 years later, it ran afoul of the Big Snow of 1947, as did this writer. When it was time for us to shove off for the Mansfield opening night, there was a great drift lodged against our door and we didn't have a shovel.

Ten years have passed since Blitzstein created "The Cradle Will Rock" and it shows all of them. To put it mildly, the proletarian musical is dated. It belongs to an era when theatrical leftists were penning propaganda in which a villain had a mustache like the appendages on a Texas Longhorn and the hero had a halo like an angel.

The villains were usually businessmen, or almost any men or women who had more than a couple of dollars in their pockets. The heroes were usually radicals and direct actionists. They were painted in blacks and whites, with no gray tones in between. A hero couldn't have a single fault and a villain a single virtue.

The point, you see, was not to paint a picture from life, not to depict people as they really are, but to distort life and character, the better to sell a dubious bill of goods. Not art, but artifice, or craft, seemed to be the idea. Stack the cards for the suckers.

Now, Blitzstein is a clever craftsman and used the leftist dramatic formula well. And producer Michael Myerberg has engaged such capable players as Alfred Drake, Vivian Vance, Will Geer, Muriel Smith, David Thomas, Estelle Loring, Dennis King, Jr., Walter Scheff, Jack Albertson, Jo Hurt and Chandler Cowles for the current production.

And in place of that single pianist, who was Blistzstein, there now is an evening-dressed orchestra with the conductor, Howard Shanet, in white tie and tails!

A blue cyclorama constitutes the scenery, with the large cast sitting before it in chairs on a raised platform. The principals have been skillfully coached by Howard Da Silva, through, according to the program, courtesy of Paramount Pictures.

"The Cradle Will Rock" throws rocks at factory owners, musicians, painters, newspapermen, doctors, football coaches and college prexies. Blitzstein appears to believe that anyone with folding money in his pocket is a rogue and anyone without is downright unhappy. But things will be all right when guys like Larry Foreman throw mill tycoon Mr. Mister out of his cradle.

If you don't feel like braving the snow and the slush of these pneumonia-weather nights, you can, in our opinion, get a pretty good idea of "The Cradle's" content by dialing a musical program on your radio and reading an old speech by Henry Wallace or Earl Browder.

• • •

Starting Sunday afternoon and for the rest of the run Michael Myerberg prefaces "The Cradle Will Rock" with an olio of concert acts. This will consume 50 minutes, divided evenly between song and dance. The lyric half will be contributed by members of the cast of "Cradle," and for the first week the dancing will be Jose Limon and Company's "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias."

Myerberg proposes to have a new concert program each week. Because of the lengthened performance the curtain will rise at 2:30 at matinees, 8:30 for night showings.

PM EXCLUSIVE

DECEMBER 29, 1947

Kronenberger

'The Cradle Will Rock' Comes Back to Broadway

So successfully was *The Cradle Will Rock* revived last month as a musical event that Michael Myerberg has now revived it as a theatrical one. He brought it into the Mansfield Friday night in its new musical form – that is, with Leonard Bernstein conducting a small orchestra; not, as of yore, with Mr. Blitzstein playing a lone piano. One noted certain other differences also—most of them very well set forth by Mr. Hague and Mr. Lerner when they discussed *The Cradle* last month.

• • •

Much that seemed clever 10 years ago—the quick satiric flings, the glittering musical parodies—still seemed clever Friday night. And the simple rough-and-ready form of *The Cradle* still proved serviceable kept things moving, gave things pace. But *The Cradle* has never seemed to me at all distinguished, its value has always lain in the amount of emotion and excitement it could generate. And on Friday night the amount, for me at least, was not very great.

The moment is hardly propitious for *The Cradle*. Ten years ago, though war and Fascism were great world menaces, Labor in this country had some sense of seeing, from however far away, the Promised Land. It was in that sense that *The Cradle* could be so cocky about workers and could treat the bosses with a savage but quite gay contempt. Indeed, it seems to me that Mr. Blitzstein wrote *The Cradle*—with its unblushing bias, its straight-out boos and bouquets—much less as a propagandist than as a cheerleader; much less to convert outsiders than to give the home team nine locomotives and a marching song. Today, when labor cannot be so confident—when the cradle is not so much being rocked as being stoned—the mood of Mr. Blitzstein's play seems forced; the effect much less exciting than strident. Even the stagecraft can't seem the vivid stunt it once did. What holds up much the best for me are the parodies of popular songs.

• • •

Mr. Bernstein I think, has done handsomely by the music, and Howard da Silva quite well by the staging. Muriel Smith comes off easily first among the singers; the acting, for the most part, is adequate rather than accomplished. It seems to me though perhaps it will not seem so to others, that Alfred Drake's Larry Foreman is brash where it should be lusty.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

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The New York Times

DECEMBER 27, 1947

Blitzstein's 'Cradle Will Rock,' Vivid Proletarian Drama, Revived at Mansfield

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Impervious to the weather, as usual, the drama kept open house at the Mansfield last evening with a blistering revival of Marc Blitzstein's "The Cradle Will Rock." Despite the storm a full audience was on hand to salute it. For Mr. Blitzstein's "play in music," as he calls it, is the most vivid proletarian drama ever written in this country. Although it has now acquired such tokens of respectability as Leonard Bernstein in a boiled shirt, bull fiddles, greased horns and other cultured instruments, it is no less militant and exciting than it was a decade ago when Mr. Blitzstein wore a soft shirt and played the whole score on a one-man piano.

* * *

Concede something to the years. The story of the unionization of Steeltown comes in an old-fashioned model now. In his shellacking of the rich and his whitewashing of the unions, his emphasis is dated, and the echoes from ten years ago sound hackneyed. But the extraordinary vitality of "The Cradle Will Rock" derives from the vigorous eloquence of the score, the sharp bite of the lyrics and the graphic simplicity of the production. As in any genuine work of art, form and content are identical. Having something passionate to say, Mr. Blitzstein has said it with startling directness, making no concessions to dramatic conventions. At the moment it is impossible to recall another musical drama so candid, so original and so fresh in stage conception.

Of the pioneer company only Will Greer remains, tall, unctuously villainous in a good old-fashioned medicine-man style. As the representative of the iniquitous rich, Mr. Geer is as subtle as a poster. In the part of the economic royalist's wife, Vivian Vance is also mannered. No doubt Mr. Blitzstein has written those parts to be played in that hand-me-down fashion. It is hard for a rich character to pass through the eye of Mr. Blitzstein's savage needle.

* * *

At any rate, it is easier for a singer to give a good performance in the virtuous union roles, and the current company includes some excellent actors. Take Estelle Loring as the street moll: she sings one lament—almost religious in style—with a kind meditative rapture. As the embittered apothecary, David Thomas sings his part and acts it in a vein that is both sensitive and caustic.

Alfred Drake sings the part of the union organizer with enormous gusto, giving it sweep and volume as well as charm. For sheer artistry there is no one to equal Muriel Smith. She plays the part of the sister of a steel-worker who has been sabotaged by the boss' hirelings. Miss Smith has a beautiful voice, and knows how to use it. She acts with an instinctive selflessness that is nothing short of exalting.

In short, Miss Smith is pure artist. Someone ought to do our town the favor of writing a singing drama for her. One of the many virtues of Mr. Blitzstein's remarkable opera is the space it has for a fine musical fulmination by Miss Smith.

The Sun

DECEMBER 27, 1947

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The Cradle Still Rocks, but——

Those hardy New Yorkers who braved last night's polar regions and frozen wastes to sit in upon the exercises at the Mansfield found Marc Blitzstein's "The Cradle Will Rock" a frequently exciting stage piece in its new presentation, but also a satire that seems to have lost a good deal of its timeliness. Michael Myerberg is the new sponsor.

"The Cradle Will Rock," a durable property—a decade has fled by since it was first produced—now takes up its stand in a highly competitive Broadway field and its engagement, according to Myerberg's announced plan of strategy, will be a limited one.

Blitzstein's play in music—or his opera, if you prefer it that way—is a no-scenery piece. No props, either. There is an orchestra upon the stage, brilliantly conducted by Leonard Bernstein, and the cast is seated in chairs, arranged in three orderly rows. The players rise upon cue and speak, or sing, their pieces.

The locale of "The Cradle Will Rock" is Steeltown, U. S. A., on a night of a union drive, and the presentation is in ten scenes, without an intermission. "The Cradle" is a satirical piece that blasts and berates the capitalists; it attacks the press, the pulpit, the police and men of medicine. It is often more operatic than it is theatrical and there is some excellent singing at the Mansfield. And good playing, too.

Alfred Drake is lusty and vigorous as the young labor leader. Will Geer is unctuous and sanctimonious in the role of Mr. Mister, a cartoon of a capitalist. Vivian Vance, always a good trouper, brings exuberance to her playing as Mrs. Mister. Jo Hurt contributes an engaging performance as the daughter of those despicably rich Misters, and she helps to make a Hawaiian number delightful.

Dennis King Jr., a young actor who is getting to be uncommonly effective in his characterizations, has the role of Junior Mister and Jesse White, once the sanitarium bouncer in "Harvey," is first-rate as a tough-plain clothes man. Brooks Dunbar is in good voice as Editor Daily, and Muriel Smith sings wonderfully. Leonard Bernstein speaks the lines of the night court clerk.

"The Cradle Will Rock" is less impressive than it was ten years ago, but it offers good music, good singing and a moderately stimulating evening in the theater.

Journal American

DECEMBER 27, 1947

Well-Cast, Grand Show With Lesson on Money

By ROBERT GARLAND

Stupid and shortsighted, venal and vindictive, like all Americans with a balance in the bank, I had to see Marc Blitzstein's "The Cradle Will Rock" at least four times before I discovered how to go about enjoying this 10-year old propaganda piece with music. Last night, at the Mansfield, it dawned upon me suddenly.

All you've got to do is to make up your mind that everybody with their balance in the bank is, as I've said, stupid and shortsighted, venal and vindictive, while everybody without a balance in the bank is bright and farsighted, honest and forgiving. Then, "The Cradle Will Rock" becomes a good show with a moral lesson.

So white are the moneyless, so bright are the monied that you're sorry you're faring as well financially as you are. This, however, can be remedied by joining almost any nearby union.

* * *

Don't Trust Mr. Mister

But never, under any circumstances, put your trust in Mr. Mister. He's the big shot in the mansion on the hill. His wife, Mrs. Mister, is a nitwit. His son, Junior, is a moron. His daughter, Sister, is no brighter than she should be. And he, himself, is the dastard who owns the mortgage and the press. And the police.

On the other hand, Larry Foreman is a fine upstanding fellow. So is Moll, a young lady of the evening. And the Polocks, fresh off Ellis Island. And Ella Hammer, a worker's widow. And Harry Druggist, a poor but honest pharmacist who will not frame a foreigner. Not even to save his drug store and his soda-jerking son.

These are as good as Mr. Mister and his satellites—the pulpit, the press, the police and the professors—are bad. Caught helplessly between the two of them, the middle class is suffocating.

* * *

Play Well Cast

In this, its fourth Metropolitan showing, "The Cradle Will Rock" is tremendously well cast. Neither at the Century, where it was first shown 10 years ago, nor at the 48th Street or the City Center, where it has since been seen, has Marc Blitzstein's propaganda piece with music been heard to such professional advantage.

Under Howard Da Silva's direction, made possible through the "courtesy" of Paramount pictures, Alfred Drake, Vivian Dance, Will Geer, Muriel Smith, David Thomas, Dennis King, Jr., Marie Leidal and Estelle Loring do better by Mr. Blitzstein's score than it may perhaps deserve. So do Leonard Bernstein and his own stage musicians . . .

Once you've adjusted yourself to the badness of the rich and the goodness of the poor "The Cradle Will Rock" becomes that grand show with a moral lesson to the effect that the lack of money is the root of all virtue. This, Milan Blitzstein has set self-consciously to utilitarian music.

New York Post

DECEMBER 27, 1947

Word of a Labor Revival

— By Richard Watts Jr. —

When Marc Blitzstein's labor opera, "The Cradle Will Rock," was presented in 1937, I described it as "an exciting and savagely humorous social cartoon with music." As revived last night at the snowbound Mansfield Theatre, with Alfred Drake in the role of the heroic union organizer created by Howard Da Silva, it continued to be stirring and amusing, even though time has deprived it of some of its topical bite. This, it should be quickly added, is not because its ideas about industrial conflict are no longer important, but merely because details are changed.

If "The Cradle Will Rock" seems less sardonic and emotionally powerful than it did originally, it is still an arresting piece of work, and a tribute to Mr. Blitzstein as a composer and a propagandist. For his "play in music," as he calls it, is frankly and proudly propaganda. It is belligerently for labor and against the big industrialists, the capitalist press, the strike-breaking police, and the clergy, intellectuals and artists, who do the industrialists' bidding. In my first review I called it "a cartoon with music," and I still think it's a good description.

Taking the stock figures of industrial conflict, it caricatures the foes of labor bitterly, makes heroes with pure hearts of its working class characters, and goes about its task with humor, gusto and tunefulness. In Michael Meyerberg's current production, it is well sung and played. I liked everyone in the cast, in particular Mr. Drake as the labor hero, Muriel Smith as a defiant girl unionist, Will Geer (of the original cast) as the wicked industrialist, Dennis King Jr., and Jo Hurd as his bored son and daughter, and Estelle Loring as a wistful prostitute. Leonard Bernstein directed the orchestra and did a slight bit of acting.

New York Herald Tribune

DECEMBER 28, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

It's a Beautiful Cradle

TEN years after its first embattled production Marc Blitzstein's musical play, "The Cradle Will Rock," has been given a savagely arresting revival at the Mansfield. The current offering has been fancied up considerably. While still bare of scenery and costumes, it has been given fluent stage movement by Howard da Silva, who was head man in the original production. The inherent drama of the work comes through with a punch. Meanwhile an on-stage orchestra under Leonard Bernstein's direction gives full expression to the musical accompaniment of a sardonic, impassioned and singularly gay entertainment.

Like John Howard Lawson's "Processional" of the '20s, "The Cradle Will Rock" is drawn in the bold, black and white strokes of a proletarian cartoon. The author leaves no one but union organizers and workers out of his searing indictment of the social and economic system. Some of his soap box perorations are a bit dated today. Few of them are even vaguely original. But the sheer vigor of the lines and lyrics and the exciting underlining of the action by the score make for an extraordinarily vital play in music. In it the labor movement has a piece of theater of which it may be exceedingly proud. Michael Myerberg is to be congratulated for permitting play-goers to view and hear the show again in a brilliant presentation.

* * *

Will Geer alone remains of the initial company, playing the Mr. Mister of Steeltown with the affability of a poisonous spider. The role is cut to pattern, as are most of those in "The Cradle Will Rock," but the actor handles it with handsome two-dimensional effect. Alfred Drake, of "Oklahoma" fame, has the part of the union organizer and he gives it a gusto and vocal eloquence which are irresistible. His first appearance from the rows of chairs which seat the company between scenes is as impressive a bit of performing as he has ever done. Estelle Loring, as the Moll, sings the Blitzstein lament of a prostitute superbly and Brooks Dunbar contributes a rich, sarcastic humor to Editor Daily.

The ten scenes of what is certainly an outstanding composition of the modern stage are full of color and impact, despite the lack of props. That in which Mrs. Mister subsidizes a violinist and a painter has an uproarious comic quality and so does that in which Mr. Mister's son and daughter caricature the idle rich. Vivian Vance is good as Mrs. Mister. David Thomas, as a dispossessed druggist and Muriel Smith, playing the sister of a framed Negro mill worker get closer to the indignant core of the piece. The latter is especially fine. "The Cradle Will Rock" seethes with indignation, but it never stutters and it is filled with ironic amusement. It is filled with ironic amusement. It is good to see it again, in so immaculate a revival.

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 27, 1947

'Cradle Will Rock' Still Good Theater

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Another and most exciting chapter was written last night in the curious adventures of "The Cradle Will Rock."

Ten years old, the play with music was presented for the first time in a regular theatrical run. The vitality of the work continues to be irrepressible. The cast brings it the urgency it demands to be an exciting evening, even though the score itself no longer sounds startlingly fresh.

Marc Blitzstein depicts with fluid ease a many faceted cross section of society in Steeltown, U. S. A., on the night of a union drive. With great simplicity he makes penetrating and caustic comment, and projects a rare feeling of a community's past and future.

Conductor Announces Scenes.

The principals, chorus and orchestra are seated on stage from the rise of the curtain. The scenes are announced briefly by Leonard Bernstein, conducting the musicians. The people involved in each incident simply step forward for their entrances, and the action is accented with varied lighting.

The highpoint of this performance is a stark illustration by Alfred Drake of what it means for a personality to be undeniable star material. Playing with a generally expert cast, Drake impresses here with acute intelligence and a luxurious capacity for dominating a stage.

He plays and sings with wit and scorn, and rises to powerful climaxes with no suggestion of consuming his resources. His Foreman, who alone has courage and foresight to know what the union must be, is a brilliantly canny portrayal.

Muriel Smith Scores.

Muriel Smith last night drew a hefty round of applause for her cool moving rendition of "Joe, Worker, Gets Gypped" with its description of her brother's death as a result of his union activity.

As the moll whose arrest on a charge of soliciting lends the whole play a continuity of desperation, Estelle Loring sings with beauty and appropriate resignation.

Vivian Vance and Will Geer as Mr. and Mrs. Mister, who run the town, play the trivial irony of their roles with complete success, yet neither entirely stirs up a sense of menace that the characters' positions in the play suggests.

Duet on Idleness.

Leslie Litomy has a striking bit with a porcine defense of military training, and Dennis King Jr. is particularly good as the oafish son of the Misters in his duet on idleness with Jo Hart. These two convey real viciousness as the scions of the rich.

David Thomas is the sheepish druggist, and Marie Leidal and Walter Scheff give the play its loveliest moment as the adoring Polish couple whom the druggist betrays to their deaths.

Among the lighter citizens of the town are the two fawning professors gaily analyzed in all their hypocrisy by Chandler Cowles and Jack Albertson.

Moves Gracefully.

Howard Da Silva of the original cast, has staged the play so it moves gracefully and fast, and Leonard Bernstein conducts the preceedings with his usual understanding and finesse.

Its age has certainly not debilitated "The Cradle Will Rock." It is fresh and vigorous theater with a punch.

"Crime and Punishment"

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 23, 1947

'Crime, Punishment' Is Played to the Hilt

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

For absolute theatricality in a forum for unsuppressed acting, "Crime and Punishment" is a rare play. Splashed across a ratty tenement, it exploits a gamut of self-indulgent temperament.

The expression of the play, adapted from Dostoyevsky's novel, is tempestuous. It is rich in character and spiritual nakedness, digestible only because it is consistently objective theater.

The thread of the play is Raskolnikoff's crime, the murder of the pawnbroker and her sister. His story is tortured one of contained panic, compassion, spiritual collapse and redemption.

Tangle of Humanity.

The tangle of humanity around him is his motive. Poverty and idealism have placed him in bodily friction with the dregs of his world. These are the selfish, combative, indolent, bullying breakdowns of society.

He pretends that he murdered vermin justifiably, and that his gift to a tubercular widow was charitable. But at heart he is a pure egotist and insists that rabble exists only for the sake of the abnormality it may occasionally produce, the character of ruthless might, who can destroy to conquer and be crowned. He believes that he is one such exception to society.

These people live with no possible privacy. Flimsy curtains hang between their most intimate lives, and they treat each other with consequent wrangling disrespect.

The action of the play effects a sleepless hive, as attention is localized with lighting, but movement continues in off the street, down the stairs, through one room to another. The stir is lulled for key scenes, but there is always a feeling that no one could safely finish a secret sentence in this house.

John Gielgud's Raskolnikoff is disturbing to watch. At the very start the student is wrought up to a point where he is capable of the murders. This agonized soul can rise later to a higher key only in reaction to sharp climaxes, and the star has to force his voice to accomplish this.

Lillian Gish gives a tremendously uncompromising performance as a tubercular shrew. Katerina devils her children and berates her husband while he is dying. She is pretentious, vain and idiotic. Where Miss Gish might have played for pathos, she has had the integrity to keep the character preposterous.

She is a wraith of strength, befitting her illness, and her voice is strident. Her mad dancing exit is powerful because she sustains it as the grotesque end of a useless woman.

Consistent Character.

Vladimir Sokoloff is infinitely deft as the slickly sadistic magistrate. It is a more consistent character than any of the others, but he gives the most entirely satisfying performance of the cast.

Dolly Haas plays Sonia as a dull girl, which makes Raskolnikof's recognition of her as a fellow sinner ironic. Her faith is the simplicity of fanaticism and uninspiring.

Sanford Meisner has an excellent drunk scene, and E. A. Krumschmidt is a pompous moneybags. Alexander Scourby is extremely good as the only really happy person in the crowd.

This play might be great if every casting detail were perfect, for each walkon has potentialities. As it stands, the little pieces of the huge jigsaw are extermely uneven.

'CRIME AND PUNISHMENT.'

A dramatization of Dostoyevsky's novel by Rodney Ackland; directed by Theodore Komisarjevsky; settings by Paul Sherriff; costumes by Lester Polakov; presented by Robert Whitehead and Oliver Rea in association with Bea Lawrence at the National Theater Monday evening, December 22, 1947. The cast:

Lebeniatnikoff ..... Ben Morse
Sonia ..... Dolly Haas
Katerina Ivanna ..... Lillian Gish
Polya and Leda, her children,
Betty Lou Keim and Sherry Smith
Ivan ..... Paton Price
Amalia ..... Elizabeth Neumann
Street Vendor ..... Howard Fischer
Anyuska ..... Wanna Paul
His Assistant ..... Robert Donley
Lodger ..... Scott Moore
Ex-soldier ..... Michael Arshansky
Nastasia ..... Galina Talva
Luzia ..... Susan Steell
Lizaveta ..... Mary James
Rodion Romanitch Raskolnikoff ..... John Gielgud
Simon Zaharitch Marmeladoff ..... Sanford Meisner
Dmitri Prokovitch Razoumikhin ..... Alexander Scourby
Zametoff ..... Richard Purdy
Casimir Stanislawowitch Looshinsky ..... E. A. Krumschmidt
Pulcheria Alexandrovna ..... Alice John
Dounia ..... Marian Seldes
Porfiri Petrovitch ..... Vladimir Sokoloff
A Strange Man ..... Mort Marshall
Priest ..... Sandy Campbell
Doctor ..... Patrick McVey

SYNOPSIS: The action takes place in a lodging house in St. Petersburg in the summer of 1860. Scene 1, evening; Scene 2, morning, a week later; Scene 3, late afternoon and evening of the next day; Scene 4, the following morning; Scene 5, morning of the following day.

Journal and American

DECEMBER 23, 1947

Brave New Attempt To Stage Great Novel

By ROBERT GARLAND

Up to the present writing, which is after last night's performance at the National, nobody has succeeded in transplanting Fedor Dostoyevsky's "Crime and Punishment" from library onto stage. Certainly not Rodney Ackland, whose brave new effort has come into 41st Street with John Gielgud as star, with Lillian Gish and Dolly Haas as featured players.

So sprawling a testament as the Russian novelist's most celebrated fiction—it followed "Letters From the Underworld" and preceded "The Idiot"—resists any attempt to fit it into the theatre's contracted frame. Many have tried! But none has managed to capture more than fleeting fragments from the murky Muscovite's magnum opus.

In my days and generations, Laurence Irving first tried in "The Fool Hath Said." E. H. Sothern acted that one. Later, Mr. Irving tried again in "The Humble." Basil Sydney was the murderer. Then came Victor Wolfson with his version called, frankly, "Crime and Punishment." Morgan Farley whined his predestined way through its few consecutive performances.

And, preceding all of these, Richard Mansfield had a tailor-made version called "Rodion the Student" in which he suffered infrequently in repertory.

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In All Directions

But, while several of these "Crime and Punishments" were not too unsuccessful as vehicles for starry-eyed actorial ambitions, not one of them was successful as a play. So it's no vast surprise to find Rodney Ackland's current condensation mounting its imported Paul Sherriff setting and, in Lester Polakov's imported costumes, riding off in all directions.

Frequently, it's like seeing two plays being acted in alternating instalments. There's the story of the Rodion Romanitch Raskolnikoff who kills the money-lender and is sadistically pursued by Porfiri Petrovitch, the examining magistrate and a detective whose name is Zametoff. This is the narrative in which John Gielgud is most concerned.

Then, while Rodion Romanitch Raskolnikoff is moping in his chamber, there's the story of Katerina Ivanna, the second wife of Simon Zaharitch Marmeladoff, the mother of Polya and Leda and the confidant of Sonia, Simon Zaharitch Marmeladoff's daughter by a former marriage. In Katerina Ivanna you have a suicidal aristocrat in peasant's clothing.

For two acts and five scenes, it's Sonia, the girl, and Rodion, the boy, who, whenever Rodney Ackland thinks about it, pull "Crime and Punishment" together.

• • •

Worth While to See

As a show, a spectacle or a stunt, this Russian-by-way-of-England transplanting is worth the curious theatregoer's while, although I don't believe you'll hear the Herald Angels sing that "Crime and Punishment" is just the thing for Christmas. But its setting—a combination of "One-Third of a Nation," "Street Scene" and "The Voice of the Turtle" is something to record.

So is Dolly Haas' beautifully modulated enactment of the role of Sonia, Simon Zaharitch Marmeladoff's first wife's daughter. Her reading of the gospel dealing with the resurrection of Lazarus is unsurpassed on any Broadway stage. But the Katerina Ivanna of Lillian Gish leaves me unmoved, even as I wish I felt like bravoing with the others.

As for the Rodion Romanitch Raskolnikoff of the starring Mr. Gielgud, it has its ups and downs, broken into by fainting spells and fits of crying. I'm sure Rodion, the mild young Russian murderer, was made that way and that John Gielgud knows. It But, to my non-Dostoyevsky-ian thinking, the Porfiri Petrovitch of Vladimir Sokoloff is the evening's histrionic high spot....

Don't get me wrong. This Robert Whitehead-Oliver Rea presentation of the Rodney Ackland adaptation of the Feodor Dostoyevsky "Crime and Punishment" is a *succes d'estime* all right. But the esteem's not wholeheartedly my own!

"Crime and Punishment"—*continued*

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune

DECEMBER 23, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

On the Grand Scale

DOSTOYEVSKY'S "Crime and Punishment" has inspired a new and turbulent dramatization at the National Theater. John Gielgud has produced the Rodney Ackland adaptation of the Russian classic with detailed and gloomy emphasis. He plays the central role in the same manner. Framed in a massive setting and performed by a huge cast, the sheer dimensions of the novel receive a considerable tribute in the course of five extended scenes. Some of these are uncommonly good, with Lillian Gish, Vladimir Sokoloff and Dolly Haas giving the English actor-manager his chief support in an account of individual and collective misery. On the whole they are somewhat surfeiting.

* * *

The work was done in London a year and a half ago and retains the Paul Sherriff setting which permits a pandemonium of action to be going on simultaneously in different sections of the stage. Unfortunately there is more extraneous confusion than definitive drama on more than one occasion. Theodore Komisarjevsky has not lessened this general effect by his direction. The inhabitants of a squalid St. Petersburg lodging house in 1860 create swirling human patterns behind the tale of a murderer who put himself above the common herd and suffered agony of atonement before his final expiation. The backgrounds, both human and physical have a way of dwarfing the main thesis in the theater, where they did not do so in a book.

* * *

The conspicuous scenes in an impressive offering are those which find the principals in the center of the stage. Gielgud brings a fine hysteria and cunning evasion to those in which he pitches his theory of a superman against the prying investigation of Sokoloff, playing a patient bloodhound. The latter is admirable, as he lets the guilty man revolve around him like a moth in ever decreasing circles, until he confesses and gives himself up. In their joint examination of the subjects of the title, the show takes on a vitality and intensity which makes it commanding. When the star merely flings himself in and out of his bedroom, while the plot is concerned with a dying consumptive, the death of her husband or the dishonor of her stepdaughter, his acting is on too high a pitch for comfort.

* * *

Miss Gish and Miss Haas create most of the poignance in the proceedings. The former's pretensions to past position as the sick Katerina are effected with a maximum of skill, while her horror at having sent her husband's child to a brothel is very real indeed. The latter plays with simplicity and tremendous conviction, giving a particularly touching quality to the final scene, in which she succeeds in having Rodion humble himself and make public expiation for his terrible guilt. There is a good bit by Sanford Meisner as the derelict father and Alice John flutters rather uncertainly through a scene or two as the murderer's mother. "Crime and Punishment" has been done on a grand scale at the National. It offers a great deal of first-rate theater along with a deal of irrelevant Slavic pageantry.

The New York Times

DECEMBER 23, 1947

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

By putting his head together with Dostoyevsky's, Rodney Ackland has conjured up an imaginative and flaring drama that needs a perfectly-trained company. It is a dramatization of "Crime and Punishment." With distinguished actors in the chief parts, it was staged by Komisarjevsky at the National last evening. Whatever its exact qualities may be, it is a fascinating adventure into the centrifugal theatre, with temperamental people erupting all over the stage and some vivid individual scenes acted with color and skill. If Mr. Ackland does not put the whole Dostoyebsky's turbulent novel on the stage, he puts enough of it there to make an interesting evening of theatrical chiaroscuro.

As the intellectual murderer, John Gielgud gives the most brilliant of his New York performances. Lillian Gish as the terrified, squalid Katerina, Dolly Haas as the placid but resolute Sonia, Vladimir Sokoloff as the gay and guileful police inspector give admirable performances. For this is an actor's holiday on a big stage in a freely-drawn play of many vagrant moods. If New York could supply Komisarjevsky with a fully-trained company under a coherent tradition, "Crime and Punishment" might be a master theatre work. All it lacks is that final rhythm and spirit. The materials are there and are thoroughly engrossing. But they need to be played like a symphony orchestra.

* * *

Perhaps this is counsel of perfection. For Mr. Ackland has written a comprehensive drama of life in a wretched lodging house in St. Petersburg in 1860. At the core of is Raskolnikoff, the poverty-stricken student who strengthens his ego by putting murder on a high intellectual plane and strengthens theory by murdering a depraved pawnshop keeper and her sister. Amid the raffish, noisy wildness of life in a lodging house he faces his conscience, anatomizes his soul and finally meets the police. Fate presses down on him, narrowing his life in the center of a tornado of lodging-house bedlam and disaster.

It is a whirl of madness and obsession, tender and brutal in succession. And it is set amid the shadowy misery of Paul Sherriff's design of a crumbling lodging-house. With memories of the orchestrated theatres of Russia a quarter of a century ago, Komisarjevsky has invented a busy and flowing performance that alternates garish and highly-populated scenes that spill over the stage with small, intense scenes between a few over-wrought characters who have been caught up in an elemental drama.

There is some wonderful acting in it. Mr. Gielgud's sharp, lean, tormented Raskolnikoff is superbly acted. As the crack-brained Katerina, mad as a March hare and messy withal, Lillian Gish reveals once more her remarkable range as an actress. Dolly Haas does as much for Sonia—composed and mouselike in the early scenes, but gathering volume as the character develops. One scene in which she reads the Bible to Raskolnikoff is particularly moving. As the cunning and grinning police inspector, Mr. Sokoloff gives a memorably graphic and pungent performance. There are excellent bits of acting also by Alice John, E. A. Krumschmidt, Sanford Meisner, Alexander Scourby and Richard Purdy.

They are all acting with freedom and exultation as though they realized that "Crime and Punishment" is theatre of size and flavor. Many of the individual scenes are uncommonly exhilarating. But on the highest level one reluctantly recognizes the fact that the structure of the entire performance is loose and impulsive. It is not perfectly orchestrated. We lack in this country the organization for drama on this huge scale. We need companies of actors who can play harmoniously with an instinctive rhythm under inspired leadership.

Still, this playgoer says thanks for a mighty interesting evening.

New York Post

DECEMBER 23, 1947

'Crime and Punishment' Strikingly Presented

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Those up-an-coming producers, Robert Whitehead and Oliver Rea, who gave us the brilliant Judith Anderson "Medea," added to the interest and importance of the drama season again last night by presenting John Gielgud in Rodney Ackland's dramatization of Dostoievsky's "Crime and Punishment." This is the adaptation of the celebrated Russian novel in which Mr. Gielgud appeared with great success in London a season ago, and it is offered here with Theodore Komisarjevsky's vigorous staging and Paul Sherriff's stunning set brought over from the British production. As is well known, London and New York audiences frequently bring in conflicting verdicts on a play, but this is an occasion where there should be a hearty agreement.

In writing, staging and acting the mammoth canvas of "Crime and Punishment" offers enormous problems for the more limited theatre, but here they have been met with intelligence, resource, and a happy amount of success. In cutting down the epic sweep of the novel to the comparatively pigmy proportions of the stage, Mr. Ackland has provided an adaptation that is neither too free nor too slavish, but is dramatic, tumultuous, faithful to the spirit of the original, and perhaps a little too sprawling. It was no easy task to find an equivalent in action for the tortured introspection of the novel, but the author has succeeded handsomely, even though there are moments when the narrative tends to grow too diffuse.

Russia, 1860

It was not simple, either, to confine the story to the single setting of a cheap St. Petersburg lodging house of 1860, but, thanks to the brilliant panorama of the lodging house created by Mr. Sherriff, the drama's unity of place is admirably retained. While the story of the student Raskolnikoff, who murdered the old pawnbroker and her sister, remains the central situation of the play, the subplots dealing with the hapless and tubercular Katerina, the noble prostitute Sonia, and the other vivid creations of the novelist, are richly and fully dramatized. Occasionally the result tends to weaken the impact of the main tragedy, but more often it adds to the drama's vividness and sense of teeming, tragic life.

In some odd way there is a resemblance to the production of "A Streetcar Named Desire" in the tumult of living that swirls across the stage of "Crime and Punishment." The vast number of characters and situations presented difficult problems of staging if the narrative were not to

become unbearably confusing, but fortunately they have been managed with imagination. I once saw a production of "Pickwick Papers" in Moscow which had a curious suggestion of Dostoievsky about it, so it may have been my imagination which led me to suspect that the staging of "Crime and Punishment" occasionally offered a slight Dickens flavor. Chiefly the atmosphere and even the flashes of broad humor are splendidly captured.

Mr. Gielgud

I must confess that I am happier with Mr. Gielgud when he is a comedian rather than a tragic actor, and that there were times when his emotional scenes seemed to me too highly pitched for comfort. Nevertheless his Raskolnikoff is a brilliant, intelligent, arresting piece of work, the performance of a distinguished artist. In the end, my only reservation is that his characterization is more striking than tragic. That, in fact, is something which must be confessed of the play. It is always deeply interesting, rather than deeply moving.

To me the finest performance is Vladimir Sokoloff's superbly humorous, sardonic, sly playing of the subtle examining magistrate. There are many excellent portrayals, though, especially by Lillian Gish as the dying Katerina, Dolly Haas as the noble prostitute, Sanford Meisner as her father, who rejoiced in whining over his sins, and Alexander Scourby as a friendly student. "Crime and Punishment" is one of the distinguished events of a particularly interesting season in the theatre.

The Sun

DECEMBER 23, 1947

"Crime and Punishment" With Gielgud as Star Has Premiere at National.

Having scored with the tragedy "Medea" earlier this season, those newcomers to the producing field, Robert Whitehead and Oliver Rea, gave Broadway first-nighters another evening in the somber mood last night as they crammed the ample stage of the National Theatre with a fine production of Rodney Ackland's dramatization of Dostoyevsky's famous novel of Czarist Russia, "Crime and Punishment."

As was the case in the successful London presentation of this same adaptation last season, John Gielgud is again starred in the central role of Rodion Romanitch Raskolnikoff, the poor Russian student who commits a double murder and then learns the terror of the hunted as a shrewd and patient officer of the police slowly tightens the net about him.

The present dramatization has much to commend it. It contains scenes of intense dramatic power, and some fine touches of macabre humor; it portrays the Russian mood skillfully; and despite its multitude of characters and its broad sweep, it is held together adroitly by the ever building tension of relentlessness. On the other hand the Ackland adaptation does demonstrate that the Dostoyevsky work is still primarily one for a novelist rather than a playwright. Transferred from the pages of a book to the stage in this version at least, it just will not squeeze smoothly into dramatic confines.

The role of Roskolnikoff presents a real challenge to an actor, and in the main Gielgud meets that challenge superbly. So much of the student's anguish is that of the mind as to make its portrayal behind the footlights extremely difficult. In the scenes where Raskolnikoff is facing Petrovitch, the police official, and where Sonia, who had turned to the streets to help her starving kin, seeks to persuade him to confess, Gielgud is at his best.

The huge cast as a whole is an excellent one. Lillian Gish, in particular creates an outstanding stage portrait as Katerina, who like the mother in "The Glass Menagerie" is clinging in poverty to the memories of fairer days. She is frenzied, unkempt, strident, yet withall pathetic, and Miss Gish makes her very real throughout. The scene at close where she displays her school diploma to the jeering denizens of the squalid boarding house is deeply moving.

Dolly Haas brings out to perfection the fundamental innocence and the religious fervor in Sonia's character, and her reading to Roskolnikoff of the story of Lazarus is one of the high points of the evening. One of the best characterizations of all is that of Vladimir Sokoloff as the police examiner. Dostoyevsky would have appreciated him. Alice John, Sanford Meisner and E. A. Krunsschmidt contribute admirable performances, too.

Theodore Komisarjevsky in his direction, however, has not always kept the confusion of the play's many characters within bounds. The setting by Paul Sheriff, showing a cross section of the first floor of a St. Petersburg rooming house of 1860, forms a highly effective background.

"Crime and Punishment" furnish an evening that is definitely grim, but has much that is rewarding, too.

HERRICK BROWN.

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 23, 1947

'Crime and Punishment' Imposing As Stagecraft, Diffuse as Drama

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Rodney Ackland's dramatization of Dostoievsky's "Crime and Punishment," which was presented last evening at the National, is an extremely impressive piece of theatrical work—a quite astonishing stunt. It is a triumph of setting and lighting, a tour de force of direction and often very exciting in its acting. As a play it is a little hard to take; I would prefer the simpler story of Mrs. Belloc Lowndes' "The Lodger" as a vehicle for John Gielgud.

It is no mean task to compress any Russian novel, particularly this one, into the neat dimensions of the stage, and Mr. Ackland has performed great feats in getting "Crime and Punishment" into the single setting of a lodging house in the St. Petersburg of 1860. Into this house he has packed a murderer and a murderer's remorse; a tubercular mother and her hungry children; a young prostitute, a procuress, many townsfolk ranging from drunken soldiers to students and people of "class," and a devilishly sure-of-himself police inspector.

A Superb Setting.

Mr. Ackland has got them all in and they don't bulge the walls—but this is because they have been sagaciously directed by Theodore Komisarjevsky and they are in a setting, by Paul Sherriff, which is the finest single theatre mounting I have seen in years and the best-lighted set since "Angel Street."

There are many admirable performances, from those of two little girls, Betty Lou Keim and Sherry Smith, to the important ones of Mr. Gielgud, Lillian Gish, Dolly Haas and Vladimir Sokoloff. The bit players, and even those who don't speak at all, are picturesque and cannily instructed. The costumes, by Lester Polakov, are perfect.

Setting, lighting, performances, costumes, direction—all of these elements, being as good as they are, should make a notable drama, if the drama were all there too. But "Crime and Punishment" resists attempts to whittle it into stage size; it wants to break loose, to get out into the wide and rambling paths of the Russian novelist. It seems a little confined and sometimes even odd within the labyrinth of Mr. Sherriff's setting, and when its attention wanders mine does, too.

Nobody Has Fun.

Mr. Ackland has had a difficult enough time squeezing the story of "Crime and Punishment" into two and a half hours of intense drama, and I can't remind you of it here beyond saying that in it nobody has any fun. It is a huge and compassionate story best left, I think, between the leaves of a thick book.

As I've said, the smallest individual performances are good. Mr. Gielgud is a finely overwrought murderer. Miss Gish has astonishing force as an aristocratic and tubercular pauper. Miss Haas is a gentle prostitute who has one fine scene in which she reads from the Bible, and Mr. Sokoloff, as the police inspector, is just plain wonderful.

"Crime and Punishment" is splendid theatre but, to me, a little less than that as drama. I can assure you that the fault is nobody else's but Dostoievsky's. He would write a novel.